

Can Anwar weather the storm?

THERE have been some pretty wild rumours that the Terengganu Menteri Besar is among the PAS leaders who may also be hauled to court.

However, Datuk Seri Dr Ahmad Samsuri Mokhtar has posted pictures of himself with the Prime Minister on Facebook, showing both men looking congenial in each other's company.

Ahmad Samsuri, better known as Dr Sam, was at the Prime Minister's official residence on Tuesday to seek assurance on the special government fund for Terengganu due at the end of the month.

It was also an instance of eating humble pie after the way he snubbed Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim during the latter's official visit to the state in January.

The pictures were well-received by Ahmad Samsuri's Facebook followers who are probably relieved to see that the pair is on talking terms.

With the first-100-day rigmarole behind him, Anwar is getting down to the nitty-gritty of governance, delivery and the inescapable challenge of realpolitik.

He is facing a fierce political storm whipped up by the graft charges against Bersatu president Tan Sri Muhyiddin Yassin and other Bersatu leaders and associates.

The storm has been blowing like crazy and it will get bigger before it calms down.

PAS president Tan Sri Abdul Hadi Awang has slammed the crackdown as "pesta kezaliman" (circus of tyranny), declaring that "tyranny is an evil that must be stopped".

There will be political fallout for both sides in the wake of the corruption charges against Bersatu leaders.



Analysis

Police reports have been lodged by both sides. Two of Anwar's political secretaries were among those making police reports against Muhyiddin for claiming the charges to be political prosecution.

In Selangor alone, 22 Bersatu leaders have lodged reports against Anwar.

The circus has indeed come to town.

There has also been a flood of clarifications from the government over what happened to Muhyiddin. The Attorney General's Chambers and the Malaysian Anti-Corruption Commission have denied any political interference.

Anwar has been on the defensive in trying to set the record straight that the charges against Bersatu leaders are based on facts and evidence.

He seemed particularly upset that PAS leaders are referring to

verses in the Quran to describe the action against Muhyiddin as oppression and tyranny.

But public opinion from day one has been that the unity government is doing what it takes to hold back the green wave ahead of the six state elections.

Anwar needs to keep whatever Malay support that his government has from straying.

"Politics is not for nice guys, they don't survive. Ismail Sabri (former prime minister Datuk Seri Ismail Sabri Yaakob) is one of the nicest guys in politics and look what happened to him.

"To survive, it is to kill or be killed. I would do the same if I were in Anwar's shoes. You have to take down the top general," said a well-connected Selangor businessman.

It is also a warning to businessmen out there who may be planning to finance Perikatan Nasional in the state elections.

And that is how the crackdown on Bersatu leaders is being perceived.

Bersatu is having a taste of what Umno went through after the 2018 general election.

Then prime minister Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad went after top Umno leaders, charged them with corruption and froze their bank accounts.

It crippled Umno, which has yet

to recover.

Has Bersatu been handicapped ahead of the state polls?

Will it still be able to go all out in the six state elections without funds and with corruption charges hanging over its leaders?

Rumours are flying that more big names will be arrested and charged.

If that is the case, why is Anwar and those around him seem so jittery?

"Muhyiddin has been the talking point. All of us could see that money was flowing like water for Perikatan in the general election but here in Terengganu, the perception even among the kampung folk is that Muhyiddin is the victim.

"I doubt it will affect Perikatan's support in Terengganu.

"The unity government would get more support if it is able to tackle cost of living issues. The hardship, especially in areas that were flooded, is terrible," said Terengganu-based political commentator Dr Azmi Omar.

According to him, Perikatan not only swept all eight parliamentary seats in the state, but the vote breakdown showed that Umno did badly in all but one of the 32 state constituencies, that is, Telemong.

Moreover, Hadi holds sway in these parts.

Anwar understands the power of the ulama in Malay politics. The

ulama in PAS had defended him and swayed Malay support for him when he was battling sodomy and corruption charges.

Surely Anwar did not expect Perikatan leaders to take things sitting down?

His supporters took to the streets when he was at the receiving end in 1998.

Lodging reports against those who criticise the crackdown goes against the right of public opinion and which a group known as Lawyers for Liberty has condemned as "unlawful, unconstitutional and tyrannical".

There are indeed no permanent friends or foes in politics. Anwar and Muhyiddin were once political allies in Umno with a shared objective of pushing Dr Mahathir off the political stage.

Azmi, who was at Anwar's Bukit Damansara home in Kuala Lumpur the night the latter was sacked as deputy prime minister, recalled that Muhyiddin was the only Umno minister who came to show moral support.

There will be political fallout for both sides but PKR insiders say the stakes are high and this is not just about the six state elections.

Anwar intends to hold on to Putrajaya for five years.

The views expressed here are entirely the writer's own.